

The remediation of television consumption: Audience conversation on Twitter

In today's complex and ubiquitous media ecology, the social practices surrounding a classic medium such as television are changing profoundly. Whereas real-time talk on television traditionally was confined to private spaces, nowadays people use social media such as Twitter to publically express their opinions about television content. This paper investigates the dynamic relation between computer-mediated messages (Tweets) and what is happening on the television screen. More specifically, we focus on tweets about '*De Zevende Dag*', a popular current affairs program of the Flemish public broadcaster. This weekly-aired program consists primarily of moderated debates with politicians. Our goal is to shed light on the connections between these mass-mediated texts and personal messages (i.e. 'remediation'), focussing on various aspects of television consumption that are discussed. We also discuss audience interpretation, looking for traces of how audience members make sense of the televised text (Livingstone, 1998; Morley, 1980).

Our research combines quantitative and interpretative content analysis of tweets sent during two episodes of the '*De Zevende Dag*', containing the program's official hashtag '#7dag'. Using the Twitter Application Program Interface (API) we collected a corpus of 589 Twitter messages. Analysis indicates that the majority of tweets (90%) is not personally directed, ergo aspire a larger public. The tweets mainly contemplate the content of the debates or interviews (89%), while a minority points at identification with the program (5%) and reflection on the format (e.g. choice of topics, host and guests; 5%). '*De Zevende Dag*' viewers share their interpretations and evaluations of the debaters on various levels: personal, professional, as well as political. These publically communicated reflections, often drenched in cynicism, reveal critical audience negotiations of televised expert opinions. Our results also indicate that viewers combine expert arguments with personal knowledge on the matter to make sense of televised text. Hence, this kind of research offers an interesting opportunity to illuminate audience interpretations on a large, public scale. Nevertheless, we conclude arguing in favour of coupling these insights with micro-level contextualizing research.

References

- Livingstone, S. (1998). *Making sense of television. The psychology of audience interpretation*. London: Routledge.
- Morley, D. (1980). *The nationwide audience: structuring and decoding*. London: BFI.